

Invisible Empire of Hate: Gender Differences in the Ku Klux Klan's Online Justifications for Violence

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Abstract

This article presents a systematic linguistic approach to mapping gender differences in the formulation and practice of right-wing ideology. We conducted a set of content- and text-analytical analyses on a 52,760 words corpus from a female-only subforum, dubbed LOTIES (Ladies of the Invisible Empire), compared with a matching corpus of 1.793 million words from a male-only subforum of the Ku Klux Klan's primary website. Using a combination of computational and noncomputational linguistic methods, we show that the wholesome and avowedly prosocial discourse of the female forum is a gateway to Klan activity and, ultimately, to the Klan's ideology through a fear-based "all means are necessary" mindset and violent sentiments. The findings also suggest that the female forum's porousness and emphasis on inclusion and homogeneity may have facilitated the spontaneous "mutation" of the traditional KKK ideology into a generic Far-Right ideology that enjoys broad consensus. Rhetorically, this generic right-wing ideology downplays overt racial and violent elements and eschews theological controversies by relating to Christianity instrumentally as a cultural heritage rather than a religion in the metaphysical sense of the word.

Keywords: terrorism, political violence, right-wing extremism, Ku Klux Klan, women, propaganda, text-analysis, computer-mediated communications, online forum

Introduction

ERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE RESEARCH has increased dramatically over the last two decades, particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States (Lum et al. 2006; Silke 2008; Silke and Schmidt-Petersen 2017; Stampnitzky 2013; Young and Findley 2011). However, this post-9/11 resurgence has mostly focused on international and homegrown jihadists (Jenkins 2010; John Horgan, quoted in Shane 2015; New America Foundation 2016; Simi 2010; Simi and Bubolz 2016) as illustrated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's recent emphasis on Islamist jihadist terrorism (Cas Mudde, quoted in Laub 2017; Nixon 2017). Domestic far-right, far-left, as well as single-issue terrorists, such as antiabortion and animal rights extremists have been less studied. Equally important is that few terrorism studies investigate the role of

females in terror and radical movements (Cunningham 2007; Jacques and Taylor 2008). Consequently, the role of women in the maintenance and transmission of violent ideologies is poorly understood. Historically, women's ideological leanings have become more explicit and tangible as their access to education and political expression increased, especially through their involvement in civic society, public relations, and child education—areas that were traditionally relegated to women.

Female violent extremists: gender differences versus gender parity

The general tendency of terrorism studies to focus on the role of males is evident in research on far-right extremist groups. For example, in his seminal field study of the racist landscape of the United States, Ezekiel (1995) exclusively

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The title alludes to the female KKK auxiliary, dubbed L.O.T.I.E.S (acronym for "Ladies of the Invisible Empire"), as to our findings, which suggest that the KKK hate ideology is being disseminated largely implicitly—and thus invisibly.

interviewed males and referenced females only in passing (for more thorough discussion of this gender bias see: Blee 2002; Bloom 2012; Bjørgo 2014). Studies of women's involvement in groups that espoused political violence have repeatedly demonstrated women's equal capacities (albeit with more limited opportunities) to partake in violent campaigns. In accord with feminist critiques of the social sciences (Cohen and Raghavan 2013), current studies appear particularly keen to feature female combatants whose accomplishments and goals were on a par with their male counterparts, as field operatives, partisans or forest fighters, guerrilla warriors, and suicide bombers (Alison 2004; Berko and Erez 2007; Blee 1996, 2002; Bloom 2012; Cunningham 2007; de Cataldo Neuburger and Valentini 1996; Eager 2016; Jacques and Taylor 2008; MacDonald 1991; Nacos 2005; Pollard 2016; Presley 1992; Speckhard and Akhmedova 2008). Conversely, ethnographic research into the auxiliary and supportive roles of women in politically violent groups often documented their frustration over being relegated to these roles and how public opinion or history downplayed their impact on their movement's accomplishments (Alison 2004, p. 458; Bloom et al. 2012; Reinares 2004; Viterna 2013).

Both general and anecdotal accounts of female terrorists indicate that their feelings of frustration and resentment exist in both left-wing and right-wing extremist groups. In left-wing violent groups, for example, the relegation of women to noncombat roles and their scarcity in higher leadership were often perceived as hypocritical considering the egalitarianism that Marxist-Leninist ideology professed (Alpert 1981; Cragin and Daly 2009; Florez-Morris 2007; Nashat and Tucker 1999; Viterna 2013). In right-wing violent groups, females (however sympathetic to the right-wing cause) historically either boycotted the group altogether or protested internally over the lack of support for women's rights, including reproductive rights and suffrage (Bacchetta and Power 2013; Blee 2008). Furthermore, the level of adherence to traditional gender roles may depend on the group's ideological goals. Women in the KKK or the Christian identity movements often provide social support and care, while those in more violent racist movements often assume a greater role in planning and facilitation of violent activities (Bacchetta and Power 2013; Blee 2002).

Considering the persistent ideological and organizational tensions between the commitment level of female extremists and the inherent reluctance of their male-dominated groups to accept them as equal, it is surprising that only a few studies examined the unique advantage that women may confer to the sustainability of radical and extremist movements through the complementarity of their prescribed gender roles. This may be particularly pertinent to far-right movements, with their emphasis on authoritarian anti-egalitarianism, control of reproductive rights to ensure racial purity, anti-liberalism, and *inter alia* anti-feminism (Bacchetta and Power 2013; Castle 2012; Castle and Chevalier 2011).

Qualitative and quantitative studies of women's role in right-wing extremist groups

From the methodological perspective, studies of extremist groups have mostly relied on ethnographic interviews with members or leaders of the movement or on statistical anal-

ysis of large-scale databases of open-source information on adverse events that are associated with the group or its members. Although both methodological approaches yielded important insights into the ideological, social, and personal characteristics of extremist individuals, they also have weaknesses. For example, to facilitate the collaboration and disclosure of extremists, interviewers often assume a deceptive stance of "naïve sympathizers" (Fielding 1990; Mitchell 1993; Robben 1995). A recent systematic review of 48 journal articles based on interviews with extremists and terrorists found a pervasive lack of transparency under which the interviews were conducted and reported (Harris et al. 2016). Since identification with extremist political movements is socially undesirable almost by definition, there is an indelible risk that the interviewee would still consider the researcher as a tacit sympathizer whose self-disclosure of neutrality is merely a lip service to governmental, institutional, or personal liability concerns (Blee 1998, p. 385; Blee 2008; Blee and Vining 2010; Vaught 2008).

Additionally to the biases that interviewers may introduce to narratives of current or past members of an extremist group, the informants themselves may—consciously or unconsciously—modify their ideology when speaking with strangers and suspected adversaries. Cohen (2016) showed that the idiosyncratic amalgam of personal and political reasons that Palestinian suicide bombers share with their families before embarking on their mission often reverts to a more political and idealistic "party line" version of the ideology in prison interviews after their mission had failed (see also Horgan and Sheehan 2008; Lafferty 2014).

Mismatches between the "party line" ideology and personal motivations of individual members are also evident in studies of extremist ideologies that are based on interviews with group leaders or ideologs. When interviewed, leaders may express idiosyncratic agendas or strategic goals that may be unpopular with, or unimportant to their constituents, or they may be swayed from the official ideology in response to leading questions. For example, racist far-right leaders have often focused on Jews as the ultimate enemy, whereas many of their members are much more concerned with and hostile to racial minorities, and are less interested in Jews (Ezekiel 1995; Freilich et al. 2015). Similarly, in the case of Palestinian terrorism, some of the most frequently quoted slogans of Hamas leaders (e.g., "we love death," "we will throw the Jews to the [Mediterranean] sea," "we will drink the blood of the Zionists") have little or no mention in personal correspondence of Hamas suicide bombers with their families (Berko 2007; Cohen 2016; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011).

Quantitative examination of databases containing details of violent extremist crimes and criminals presents a complementary method to the ethnographic studies mentioned above. The systematic and standardized inclusion and coding of extremist violent acts in the database seeks to overcome the sampling and generalizability limitations inherent in qualitative interviews. Furthermore, the operationalization of the outcome variables in the database aims to eliminate the intractable biases that arise from the personal interaction in the interview process (Freilich et al. 2018; Gruenewald and Pridemore 2012; Kerodal et al. 2016). As with interview-based sociological studies, quantitative database analysis has only occasionally been used to examine gender differences in

far-right extremism (Gonzales et al. 2014). These data sources, therefore, may be limited in their capabilities to capture the personal experience of radicalization and engagement, as manifest in spontaneous discussions among rank-and-file members of far-right extremist movements.

Content- and text-analysis of racist computer-mediated communications

The recent advent of the Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has afforded a third paradigm for studying extremist groups, based on their digital footprint and content. Of particular interest in this growing field of “digital ethnography” are web forums, where individuals can asynchronously post questions or discuss key issues of interest and receive responses (Castle 2012; Holt 2010; Silverman 2007). Forums are also composed of threads, which start when a person creates a post to which others may respond.

The conversation within forums is similar to naturally occurring group discussions since posters respond to one another within and across threads (Daniels 2009; Holt 2007, 2010; Holt and Lampke 2010; Mann and Sutton 1998). Forums also enable individuals with varying levels of ideological commitment and knowledge to communicate together, demonstrating the range of beliefs and ideas that may be present within any subculture or community (Gertenfeld et al. 2003; Daniels 2009; Holt 2007; Holt 2013; Mann and Sutton 1998). These features make forums particularly suitable for research of closed-off or otherwise “hidden” and/or high-risk communities (Lee 1995; Van Maanen 1988; Whine 1999). This is thus a useful way to examine far-right extremist groups in the United States, which are marginalized both geographically and psychologically (Blee 2009) and factionalized both ideologically and structurally (Chermak et al. 2009; Freilich et al. 2014; Simi and Futrell 2006). Additionally, online spaces provide a safe haven for far-right extremists to express their ideology, seek social affirmation for it, and boost their public image, while minimizing the risk of rejection by peers, employers, and the larger community (Blee 2002; Bowman-Grieve 2009; Caiani and Parenti 2016; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997; Kunkle 2012; Simi and Futrell 2006, 2010; Weimann 2011).

Studies employing content analyses of far-right websites found that women are mostly mentioned in the context of their duty to “racially pure” marriage and childbearing (Adams and Roscigno 2005; Castle 2012; Simi and Futrell 2006). For example, rhetorical analysis of 33 KKK sites found that persuasive appeal to women was one of its six most prominent characteristics (Bostdorff 2004). This emphasis on women’s roles as wives and mothers is largely backed by female members. Daniels (2009) found that motherhood and marriage were featured in 44 of 159 (27%) of a “ladies-only” stormfront forum threads.

Although limited, the data so far point to increasing efforts to target female recruits and/or cater to female membership in far-right websites. In fact, in the early 2000s only 2.3% of the 132 extremist websites that were examined by Schafer (2002) had sections dedicated to “women’s issues.” By early 2009, 15% of 33 websites of organized racism targeted women specifically, and 30% targeted men and women separately (King 2009; McNamee et al. 2010).

Aims and hypotheses

The present study aims to address the methodological gaps that were noted above by characterizing the ideology of female right-wing extremists through a linguistic analysis of their communications in a KKK “ladies only” web forum (dubbed “LOTIES”: “Ladies of the Invisible Empire,”) after the primordial (and mythologized) KKK women-only chapter that was founded in 1922 in Oregon. To this effect, we created a corpus from a sample of threads from the LOTIES forum (totaling 52,760 words) and contrasted it with a *matching corpus of 1.793 million words from a male-only forum* of the same website, concerning the same general topics and spanning the same time range.

Content and text analyses of CMCS afford both qualitative and quantitative characterization of the KKK ideology as instantiated in the discourse of its female supporters online. Qualitatively, this study aims to substantiate several observations and impressions from ethnographic and sociological studies. However, since our paradigm relies in large part on computerized and automated linguistic analyses, it can both quantify this instantiation of the ideology (e.g., estimate the relative prominence of ideological elements) and potentially detect changes within it—both with time and across regional or gender divides.

Our study investigates the following research questions:

- (1a) What are the most prominent political and ideological themes, concepts, values, and narrative tropes with which female KKK membership, collectively, makes sense of current U.S. political state of affairs?
- (1b) How do the themes and concepts above differ from those that are most used by the male membership to make sense of current U.S. political state of affairs?
- (2) Is there an implicit partiality toward a select subgroup of ideological concepts, values, or narrative tropes? In other words, could some of the frequently mentioned ideological words have more mobilization power than others? Alternatively, are there any ideological concepts or values—however frequently mentioned—that nonetheless systematically draw fewer responses from the membership than other themes or concepts?
- (3) Of the ideological prepositions and tropes that are commonly invoked in the justification of violent political acts, which are emphasized in the LOTIES discourse? Conversely, which justifications for political violence are only implied, while explicitly downplayed or euphemized?

Recognizing the central role that women in general, and KKK women in particular, play in the longevity and strength of extremist groups, we then examine further the ways in which the female members persuade and indoctrinate each other to the Klan ideology, and how they counsel each other in bringing their children and/or their husbands into the fold.

Data and Methods

The data for this study were collected from two subforums operating within a larger forum for a prominent national KKK group. A subforum is a subsection of a broader topic forum dedicated to discussion on a specific topic. The subforum selection process was designed to maximize the coverage of broad political day-to-day topics (as opposed to political theory

or historical debates). Thus, apart from the general theme of the forum, emphasis was put on the tenure of the forum, its popularity, and posting frequency. The female subforum was one of the oldest in the site and was touted as a “women only” section for sharing and discussing news items and current events through the lens of KKK ideology. Other subforums to which female members contributed were not exclusively frequented by female KKK members and did not focus on current political events (examples include: verse of the day, prayer of the day, jokes and funny stories, general announcements forum, etc.). To help anonymize the site and its participants, the exact name, web address, and other unique identifiers of the site or the group were omitted, consistent with the common practice in online research (e.g., Holt 2014; Quayle and Taylor 2011).

The male subforum was selected to match the entire time period of the female forum and its subject matter of discussing current political affairs and news items. Thus, of the 18 subforums that were active when the site was sampled (September 2016), only 11 subforums were as old as the female subforum and could serve as a matching corpus. Of those, three were dedicated to discussion of current politics (“Current Events,” “Funny News Stories,” and “Light Discussion”), but only the “Current Events” subforum had the best time resolution (4.77 posts per day compared with 0.81 and 1.34 for the other forums, respectively).

The forum used in this study is part of an ideologically specific community, as opposed to a more diffused Far-Right community like Stormfront (e.g., Castle 2012; Holt and Bolden 2014). It was private, as its participants had to register with the site and create a user name and password to view posted content (Holt 2010). Registration-only forums contain more detailed or revealing comments regarding deviant subcultures (Holt 2012; Holt and Lampke 2010; Meyer 1989), as compared with publicly accessible communities. Finally, this site operated an active and large web forum catering specifically to women. Thus, this data set provides a unique sample to understand the gendered nature of online communications generally.

The KKK site is a dynamically interactive microcosm, where forum members may interact with each other both on- and offline (e.g., as husbands and wives, friends, neighbors, etc.). In fact, 22.5% of the male authors (23 of the 102 authors in the female forums) and 6.4% of the female authors (13 of the 202 authors in the male forum) occasionally contributed to forums that served the other sex. Considering the inherent anonymity in online communities, identification of the sex and/or gender of a writer is rare in CMC studies (for notably successful exceptions see Argamon et al. 2007; Zhang and Zhang 2010). However, in this study, we were able to identify the genders of most authors by exploiting the decisively gendered nature of the discourse in conservative, far-right, and racist communities (e.g., Blee 2002, p. 53; Castle and Chevalier 2011), likely enhanced by an implicit demand for “performative” heterosexist characteristics to compensate for the lack of visual interaction (Anahita 2006).

Gendered words, such as “guy,” “lady,” “knight,” “priestess,” “wizard” and the like, were frequently part of the user names and were assumed to be consistent with the sex of the writer.

Based on similar assumption of heterosexism, a phrase like “my wife” was taken to mean that the writer is a man.

This method for gender detection is not faultless, and it is likely that there have been users whose name and language were gender-neutral, and may have been men who posted in the ostensibly “women-only” forum and vice versa. Such misrepresentations of gender are unlikely, since they could be readily exposed, as the website occasionally organizes physical meetings in the form of “Klanvocations.” Individuals who do not attend and do not make an effort to demonstrate that they have caught up through friends online may be outed by other users. Thus, we estimate that crossgender posting behavior is unlikely to be substantially higher than our estimate.

The interactive dynamics of this site confers further reliability to our linguistic analysis as representing stable organic gender differences in the understanding and transmission of the KKK’s ideology. As such, these gender differences are less likely to include ideological idiosyncrasies that may have developed in an isolated “women-only” forum.

Both subforums were scraped using Offline Explorer Enterprise 5.9 (Registered to the first author). However, the modest size of the subforums (1157 posts in the female subforum and 17,476 posts in the male subforum) allowed us to verify the automatic scraping of the data by manually accessing each post. The entire scrape was therefore documented in three formats: html, pdf, and Unicode txt. The latter was content verified and annotated for structural elements (e.g., titles, bottom of page, replies, emoji identification, etc.), to create the final corpus on which all text-analytical procedures for this study were carried out.

An initial scraping (i.e., downloading the content of an entire web address and its links onto a hard drive) of the LOTIES forum activity between April 2010 and April 2015 yielded 171 threads, all female initiated. However, of the 1412 posts that replied to those threads, 255 (18.1%) were written by a subset of 22 male authors (based on their self-disclosure in either the LOTIES forum or in other forums on the website) and were therefore eliminated from our analysis. Almost invariably, the male authors in the LOTIES forum have also disclosed a marital or romantic relationship to a LOTIES member. The remaining 1157 posts constituted the final LOTIES corpus in this study. To ensure that our analysis includes as much substantive communications as possible, irrelevant information, such as words that were tagged in the Unicode corpus as HTML elements should not be confused with content words (e.g., “back,” “block,” “body,” “page,” “collapse,” “cover,” “function,” “headline,” “link,” “margin,” “narrow,” “none,” “screen,” “span,” “target,” “title,” “window,” etc.). In addition, routinely repeated text, defined here as any exact combination of two or more words whose frequency was identical to the number of pages, posts, or threads, was also excluded from the final corpus. This stage eliminated repetitive text such as mottos in the users’ signatures. The final LOTIES corpus comprised of 52,760 words.

Our comparison subforum in the KKK website was inhabited by male users serving as a base to compare against the female-only section. As described above, based on preliminary mapping of the forums’ attributes and language, we identified the forum “Current Events” as the longest running and most active male-only forum, where ideological discussions are most likely to occur. Additionally, the website description of the scope and purview of the “Current Events” forum was the most similar to that of the LOTIES forum.

Scraping the male “Current Events” forum within the same period as the LOTIES corpus yielded 2135 threads. Consistent with the general male-centered character of the KKK website, all these threads were initiated by male authors. However, of the 18,194 posts replying to those threads, 718 (3.95%) were written by a subset of 13 female authors (based on self-disclosure, such as references to “my husband” and other markers on either forum), and were therefore eliminated from our analysis. The remaining 17,476 posts constituted the final male corpus for this study. As with the LOTIES corpus, all nonsubstantive, automatic, or repetitive texts were excluded from further analysis. The final male corpus comprised of 1.793 million words.

Data analysis

To minimize subjective biases based on prior expectations or strikingly eloquent members, our inquiry began with a single-word frequency analysis, to get an overall sense of the tone of the language and the predominant concepts in the discourse of the female and male membership.

Next, the generalizability of the word-level frequency analysis was examined through text analyzing both corpora using the LIWC software (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count; Pennebaker et al. 2015). We followed the computerized text-analysis with peer-responsiveness analysis, and contrasted the themes that the LOTIES membership preferentially *express* to those that they were drawn to *respond to*.

Lastly, we applied a semiautomated paradigm that extracted the LOTIES ideological features by analyzing only sentences that were preidentified as expressing strong assertions or sentiments and categorizing them according to a

comprehensive array of rhetorical components that are commonly found in grievance-based violent ideologies. The resulting profile of ideological components and their relative prominence was then contrasted and integrated with the results of the previous steps, toward a coherent characterization of the LOTIES ideology and its dynamics. In this sense, our paradigm may be viewed as a “missing link” between in-depth interviews with a select (and potentially biased) group of far-right extremists and large-scale database of their public actions and statements.

Findings

Word Cloud analysis

In this analysis, the relative frequency of a word was proportional to its size. This method is intuitive and efficient, since the visual system can capture in a glance the most prevalent words and concepts in the text, along with key indicators of its genre and tone. As with most content-analytical procedures, we eliminated high-frequency prepositions and other nonspecific speech particles. However, we deviated from a traditional Word Cloud procedure by including grammatical particles that are commonly used in persuasive reasoning, such as negations and hedges. The final list of “stop-words” included 68 words, which are listed in the caption for Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the relative prominence of the 100 most frequent words in the male and female corpora (corresponding to $N=159,340$ words in the male corpus and 5997 words in the LOTIES corpus). The Word Clouds in this study were rendered using Jonathan Feinberg’s “Wordle” algorithm (Feinberg 2010).

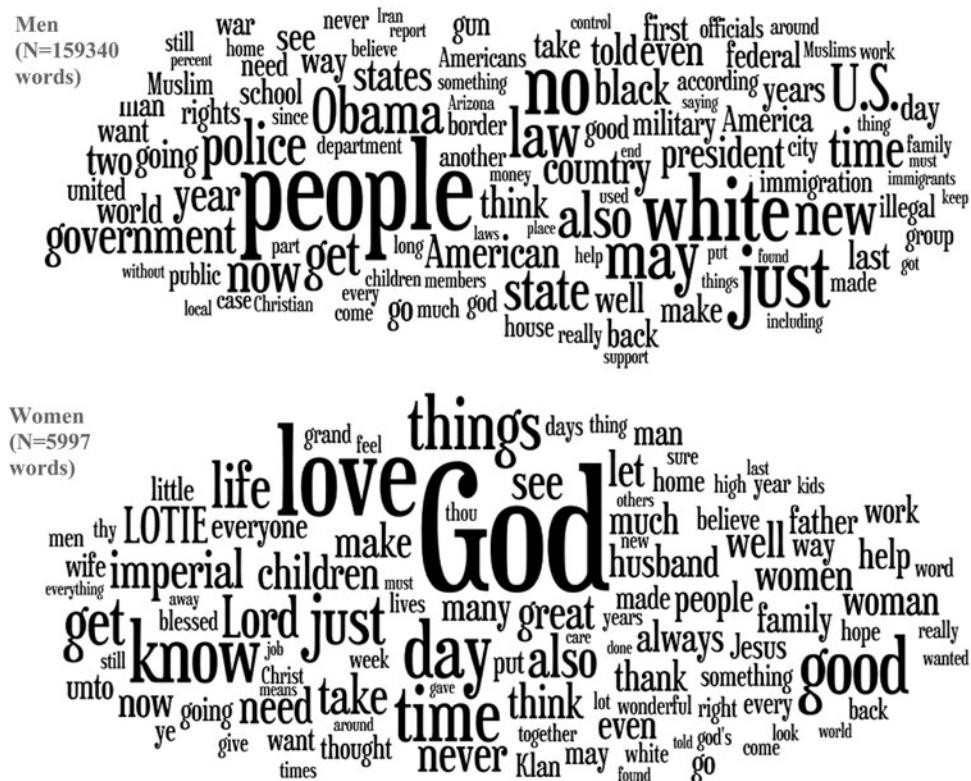


FIG. 1. Word Clouds of overall concerns and sentiments based on the 100 most frequent words in the male and female corpora. The following nonspecific “stop-words” were omitted from the word cloud: a, about, after, an, and, are, as, at, be, been, before, being, by, can, could, down, for, from, had, has, have, he, her, him, I, if, in, into, is, it, its, it’s, like, me, more, of, on, one, or, other, out, over, she, so, some, than, that, the, then, there, these, this, those, to, up, was, were, what, when, where, which, who, will, with, you, your.

As Figure 1 shows, the language of the LOTIES is replete with references to fellow female members, family life, and the Christian religion. Accordingly, the register of the LOTIES discourse is emotionally positive and supportive. At the same time, the LOTIES word choice is partial toward the generic and cultural aspects of Christianity rather than its theological, metaphysical, or KKK-endorsed versions. Thus, all the high-frequency religious words, such as “God” (which is, remarkably, the most frequent word in the entire LOTIES corpus), “Jesus,” “Christ,” “God’s,” “blessed,” “thou,” and “believe,” are words that do not suggest a specific denomination or interpretation of Christianity.

The religious aspects of the KKK ideology are—at least officially and historically—staunchly Protestant, anti-Semitic, and anti-Catholic (Brannan et al. 2014; Hoffman 1998)—for which there is no evidence in the current LOTIES forum. Contrary to traditional KKK doctrine, all occurrences of the word “Jew*” in the LOTIES corpus are positive, and concern biblical stories rather than political actualities. Furthermore, there is no trace in the LOTIES word choice of the KKK’s endorsement of “Christian Identity” theory. Rather than being the source of all evil, “Eve” is invariably mentioned by the LOTIES in the context of human fallibility and God’s forgiveness. There is also no mention of the word-stem “seed*” in the context of Eve’s satanic spawns, which, according to “Christian Identity Theory”, include Jews and other minorities (Bacchetta and Power 2013, p. 84; Brannan et al. 2014). Similarly, there is no mention in the LOTIES corpus of KKK ideologs that subscribed to the “Christian Identity” theory, such as Wesley Smith or Dan Gayman.

In sharp contrast to the LOTIES forum, the discourse of the “Current Event” forum focuses on politics (and specifically the U.S. government, law enforcement, military, and legal system) and on enemy members (with particular mentions of immigrants, Muslims, and skin color). Comitantly, the register of the male forum is nonemotional, overconfident, and assertive. This pattern of word frequencies is (in contrast to the female subforum) highly consistent with the general racist, xenophobic, and antigovernment sentiments of the KKK ideology.

It is instructive to note what ideological elements of the KKK are downplayed in the discourse of the male subforum. As their relative size suggests, the perceived threat from the U.S. government (especially the military and federal law enforcement) is looming larger in the male subforum discourse than the threat from blacks, immigrants, and Muslims. Mentions of Jews and gays are relatively infrequent, and Catholics are not mentioned as enemy. This hierarchy of concerns does not adequately match KKK ideology historically. Rather, it is consistent with George Mosse’s idea of “scavenger ideology” (Mosse 1995), whereby to survive, an extremist group may abandon its foundational creed and opt for a more adaptable patchwork of popular ideological elements. Our findings are also consistent with current observations, that most far-right groups in the United States have “settled” for a generic antigovernment and antiforeigner messaging (Bjelopera 2012; Blee and Creasap 2010; Brannan et al. 2014), to which an emphasis on the right to bear arms and the urgent calls for the literal creation of “well-armed militia” has reached a fever pitch in the 1990s (Chermak 2002; De-

partment of Homeland Security (DHS) 2009; Karl 1995). Indeed, while the word “Jew/s” are mentioned 329 times in the male forum, the word “gun/s” is mentioned 2334 times and “firearm/s” 368 times.

Computerized thematic analysis

Computerized Thematic Analysis of the corpora was carried out using the LIWC 2015 software, registered to the first author (Pennebaker et al. 2015). The decision to use the LIWC was based on its widespread popularity as on its versatility to capture key psychological and ideological concepts across a wide variety of contexts, such as aggression, deception, and psychopathic personality traits in civilian discourse (Kramer et al. 2014; Moskvichev et al. 2017; Pennebaker 2011; Pennebaker et al. 2003; Preoțiuc-Pietro et al. 2016, 2017; Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010) and radicalization/extremism in political discourse (Figea et al. 2016; Pennebaker and Chung 2008; Vergani and Bliuc 2017). Additionally, the preliminary analyses that preceded the Computerized Thematic Analysis (i.e., word frequency analysis and the word cloud) showed no indication that the most prominent words in the forum would be better characterized by *ad hoc* categories rather than those of the LIWC (see examples for the latter case in Cohen 2012, 2015b). The main limitation of the LIWC is its treatment of words as devoid of context, which is particularly problematic when attempting to gauge the magnitude of affect, attitudes, and sentiments, whose words could be hedged or negated (see Cohen 2011). However, this limitation was not deemed significant for our current attempt to map the broad thematic landscape of the forum.

The results of the Computerized Thematic Analysis are presented in Table 1. The prominent word categories seem to closely substantiate the impressions from the word-level analysis. For example, some of the female forum most prominent words are “love,” “good,” and “great,” which are markedly underrepresented in the male forum and correspond with the overall surplus of (positive) emotion words in the female forum that was found in Table 1. Similarly, some of the most prominent words in the male forum are power-related words, such as “government,” “law,” “police,” and “president,” which are far less frequent in the female forum and are consistent with Table 1 significant prominence of power category (as well as big words comprising of over six letters) in the male forum over the female one.

The LOTIES forum as a whole makes four times more references to females and to traditionally female-related themes, and is almost four times higher in Emotional Tone, which is a composite variable that encapsulates a positive and upbeat if simplistic writing style, with a particularly low level of negative emotions and hostility (Pennebaker et al. 2015). Additionally, the interpersonal and communal nature of the LOTIES discourse is exemplified by “you,” “I,” and “We” pronouns (3.7, 3.4, and 2.2 times the prevalence in the male forum), and with words denoting assent, affiliation, social concerns (2.1, 1.9, 1.4 times the prevalence in the male forum). It is also almost twice as likely to make reference to religion.

The male forum was 8.5 times more likely to use swear words, and almost three times more likely to use anger words. Correspondingly, other words that are typically used

TABLE 1. COMPUTERIZED TEXT-ANALYSIS: PERCENTAGES OF THE LIWC DICTIONARY CATEGORIES FOR THE MALE AND FEMALE FORUMS

Theme	Males	Females	Female:Male ratio	Theme	Males	Females	Male:Female ratio
Female	0.41	1.72	4.195	Swear	0.17	0.02	8.500
Emotional tone	20.25	75.44	3.725	Anger	1.08	0.41	2.634
You pronoun	0.54	1.98	3.667	Work	3.64	1.51	2.411
I pronoun	1.02	3.46	3.392	Sexual	0.14	0.06	2.333
Family	0.37	1.2	3.243	Money	0.9	0.4	2.250
We pronouns	0.9	2	2.222	Death	0.4	0.21	1.905
Positive emotions	2.01	4.3	2.139	Risk	0.76	0.47	1.617
Assent	0.11	0.23	2.091	Big (>6 letters) words	21.56	14.45	1.492
Affiliation	2.08	3.86	1.856	Analytic	86.33	58.46	1.477
Religion	1.04	1.87	1.798	Negative emotions	2.38	1.62	1.470
Pronouns	9.09	15.3	1.683	Power	4.21	2.96	1.422
Feelings	0.29	0.48	1.655	They pronouns	1.14	0.84	1.357
Exclamations	0.78	1.25	1.603	Quote	2.44	1.92	1.271
Health	0.46	0.71	1.544	Comparisons	1.98	1.65	1.200
Social	8.81	12.75	1.447				
Body	0.43	0.6	1.395				
Affect	4.45	5.98	1.344				
Authenticity	16.90	22.62	1.339				
Home	0.37	0.48	1.297				
Insight	1.6	1.99	1.244				
Interrogatives	1.22	1.47	1.205				

All differences of proportions between male and female language categories were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) in a z-test. Bonferroni correction was used to control for incidental statistical association between dictionaries due to partial overlap of words.

in performative masculinity of the most conservative form, such as those associated with “work,” “sex,” “money,” “death,” and “risk” (Cohen 2009; Newman et al. 2008; Pennebaker et al. 2003) are all approximately twice as frequent as the LOTIES discourse. Furthermore, words that signal analytic mode of speech are 1.5 times more frequent, as are words of over six letters, which typically occur in more formal language. The hostile and xenophobic register of the male forum is partially manifest in their higher likelihood (1.4 times) to use negative emotions and “they” pronouns. Other markers of politically racist language include the frequent use of comparison and “power” words (1.2 and 1.4 times more than the LOTIES forum).

Peer-responsiveness analysis

Peer-Responsiveness Analysis estimates the extent to which the forum users reply to posts as opposed to passively reading them. Peer-Responsiveness Analysis is a relatively novel technique that has so far been used only in a few social media studies (Kwon et al. 2013; Lewallen et al. 2014; Piotrkowicz et al. 2017; Tan et al. 2014).

To estimate the relative effectiveness of each word in garnering response, we created a linear model that matched the words in the 171 threads of the LOTIES corpus to the 1157 female-authored posts that replied to them. Specifically, we created a weighted word frequency distribution, whereby every word from the thread’s title was weighted (i.e., inflated) by the number of reply posts that this thread garnered. Aside from its conceptual simplicity, this method has the advantage of preserving the word association structure in the threads’ titles rather than attempting to estimate (under the dubious assumption of independence) the effect of each word individually and *inter alia* presume a particular process for their generation or their underlying

distribution (for a more thorough discussion about the challenges in modeling the nonindependent nature of word choice see: Berninger and Winn 2006; Cohen 2009; Dell et al. 1999; McRae et al. 2012).

Building on linguistic models that view speech as an act, and therefore presume a conceptual continuum between verbal and physical modes of expression, this weighted distribution may be suggestive of the mobilization potential of a particular concept, rather than merely its prominence in the LOTIES discourse. The results are presented in Figure 2 as a Word Cloud of the relative likelihood that a certain word in the thread’s title will garner response.

Figure 2 highlights the ideological components that the membership is compelled to reply to and thus actively engage with. Although LOTIES members may mention a variety of topics, they nonetheless respond only to a select subset of those topics. Furthermore, this communal pattern is likely to be outside the awareness of the members. As such, Figure 2 can be viewed as an implicit complement to Figure 1.

Figure 2 suggests that while religious words, such as “God,” “Lord,” or “Jesus,” are highly likely to be expressed (Fig. 1), they were nevertheless much less likely to prompt replies or reposts. In contrast, posts that had words in their titles that connote heritage, identity, and tradition (e.g., the identification as a member—or probationary member—in the LOTIES forum, or as “Nordic,” “German,” and “Celtic”; craft using KKK symbols; and Traditional (white American) recipes and words that are related to their identity as mothers) had the highest rates of replies and reposts (Fig. 2). Peer-Responsiveness analysis suggests that the LOTIES put most of their efforts in co-ordinating an inclusive participation in their identity-bound activities. It also shows how recruitment is more tightly linked to the inclusion of members in LOTIES activities than inculcating them to KKK ideology.

FIG. 2. Peer-responsiveness and mobilization potential of words in LOTIES thread.



Ideology extraction using linguistic extremization

The ideology extraction using linguistic extremization (IELEX) analysis method (Cohen et al. 2016) is a hybrid method of content analysis that combines the speed of computerized text analysis with the context sensitivity of human raters. In the first stage of this procedure, sentences that are likely to express strong, absolutist, or fanatic ideas are identified using a computerized dictionary of cognitive rigidity (Cohen 2012). In the following stage, trained human raters sort those sentences according to a comprehensive list of ideological components that appear in most grievance-based justifications for political violence (Cohen et al. 2016). Considering the large size of the LOTIES forum, we chose for this study a subset of the most frequent cognitive rigidity markers (all, always, any,* and ever*), which amounted to eight words (all, always, any, anymore, anyone, anything, anyway, and anywhere) and appeared in 457 sentences. Those sentences were rated by two experienced master's level raters, who had achieved adequate interrater agreement when trained previously on another dataset. Any disagreement between those two raters was discussed in a group setting with the first author until a consensus was reached.

While coding the four most common cognitive rigidity markers, it became apparent that the word “they” was used in the forums with remarkable consistency as a linguistic placeholder to an overgeneralized enemy. Since other extremist groups (which provide the dataset for the IELEX training) are usually quite specific in referencing their enemy members, this rigidity marker was not included in the original training. To include this newly identified rigidity marker, a team of four graduate students was trained on rating the word “they” in its overgeneralized meaning, using an independent dataset. Then, 64 of the 340 sentences in the LOTIES corpus that contained the word “they” were independently rated by those raters (+ the first author) to evaluate their interrater agreement. One-way interclass correlation coefficient for the agreement between the 5 raters, with items as random effects

and raters considered fixed effects (since the same raters were going to be used for rating the rest of the sample), was 0.90 (95% Confidence Interval: $0.855 < \text{ICC} < 0.934$). After evincing adequate interrater agreement, the rest of the sentences were then divided between two groups of two raters, and the procedure resumed the consensus method described above. An example of LOTIES statements that use the cognitive rigidity markers as were discussed above, and their respective IELEX rhetorical components are presented in Table 2.

The resulting profile of ideological components represents a tendency of the LOTES members to dwell on certain ideological subarguments more than others, which is a tendency that may be largely outside their conscious awareness or control. By using a computerized procedure to identify rigid assertions, followed by human expertise to identify the "gist" of those assertions, this method allows the researcher (unlike the naive reader) to hone in on rigid ideas that are usually obscured behind copious amounts of platitudes, politeness, and euphemisms.

The IELEX method successfully predicted ideological fault lines between Al-Qaeda's Usama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri based on their propaganda videos from the same time period. Similarly, it uncovered ideological tensions (since then verified) between Al-Qaeda "core" leadership in Afghanistan and its franchise in Iraq (Cohen et al. 2016). The method has also showed how mismatches in the Jihadist ideological profiles between the so-called 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda are linked to their different choice of tactics in recruitment and violence (Cohen 2015a).

As Table 1 shows, a substantial number of sentences that include cognitive rigidity words express near-absolute commitment to, and interdependence between, KKK members. Although these exclamations may seem overly effusive, when considered with more tangible (albeit more limited) offline support on both the community level (e.g., checking in, bringing food, babysitting, and praying for the sick), and the regional level (e.g., “Klonvocations”), they may

TABLE 2. KEYWORD-BASED IDENTIFICATION OF STRONG IDEOLOGICAL ASSERTIONS USING THE IELEX SYSTEM

Each sentence is centered (“concordance”) around a computer-identified marker of cognitive rigidity (e.g., overgeneralization, overconfidence, perfectionism, etc.). The table demonstrates how the same component of a rigidly violent ideology (as determined by consensus among trained raters) may be identified through a variety of keywords. See text for more details. Typos were reproduced as they appeared in the original posts.

IELEX, ideology extraction using linguistic extremization.

nonetheless induce in the LOTIES membership a credible sense of social indebtedness. This sense of social indebtedness, in turn, is consonant with the highly effective persuasive appeals to commit *ideologically* to the KKK. Furthermore, combined with the repeated inculcation to the idea that "the U.S. government has given up on us since it is controlled by people who despise us," which appears often throughout the male forum, the grip of the ideological community is complete, well-rounded, and internally consistent.

The complete ideological profile of the LOTIES based on the most reliable and frequent cognitive rigidity markers is shown in Figure 3. The LOTIES discourse is disproportionately replete with sentences whose main idea is “We should adhere perfectly to the doctrine” (IELEX item no. 6) and its concomitant “Adhering to the doctrine is of paramount importance/priority” (IELEX item no. 14). Altogether, these two items highlight the appeals to conformity and obedience to the KKK doctrine. This finding exemplifies the complementary of the IELEX analysis to the word frequency analysis. When viewed through a “prism” that allows only for their non-negotiable statements to be considered, the LOTIES’s verbiage of pleasantries, piety, and inclusiveness gives way to an implicit demand for conformity and obedience.

Conversely, the justifications for these appeals for conformity and obedience, appear in the LOTIES discourse mostly in the form of IELEX items no. 16 and no. 17, which de-

note how much the membership would benefit from such adherence—both in terms of the portion of the group that stands to benefit (IELEX item no. 16) and how great the benefits will be (IELEX item no. 17). Figure 3 also offers a qualification of the general upbeat and personal register that the LIWC text-analysis has identified, by suggesting that the discourse of the LOTIES is largely delivered in a preachy, sermonizing tone, under the implicit premise of “my ideas are the best/closest to truth or doctrine/indisputable” (IELEX item no. 8).

Thus far, the pattern of ideological emphases points to a paradoxical balance, by which the LOTIES forum provides its female members with a platform to feel empowered—but only inasmuch as they edify the ideologically sanctioned submission and obedience to the literal word of the Bible (which is mentioned explicitly 230 times in the corpus, but implicitly referred to numerous other times), as to their husbands or male leaders. This exemplifies, the inclusiveness of the LOTIES forum, which sports both religious and nonreligious justifications for obedience in mutually non-exclusive ways. Religious justifications include, for example (Typos were reproduced as they appeared in the original posts):

- *“As women, we are the nurturers who rear our households. And while we are not to step on man’s God-given leadership in the home, we are an integral*

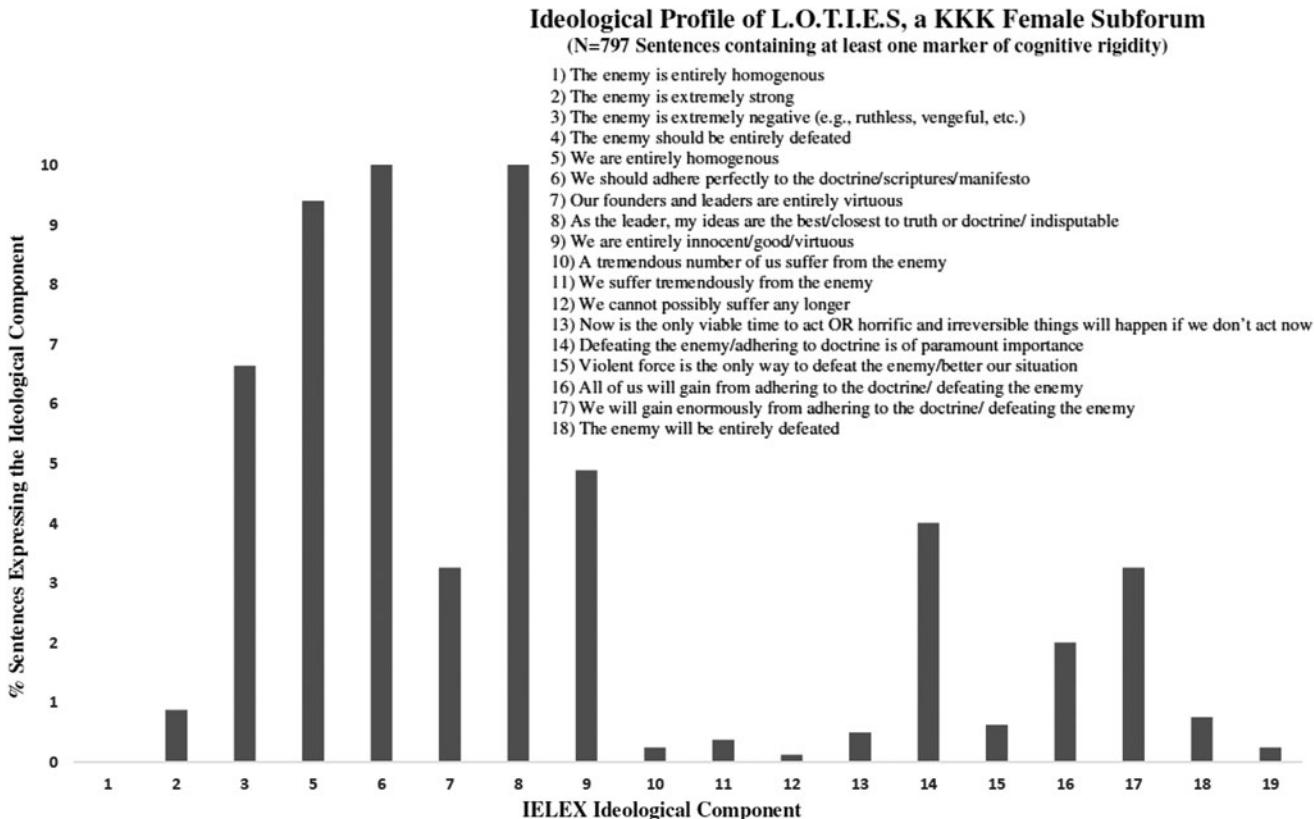


FIG. 3. IELEX-based ideological profile of the LOTIES female online forum. IELEX, ideology extraction using linguistic extremization.

key in setting the tone of not only our home, by our circle of influence. God has entrusted us with lives - our husband, children, family, coworkers, and acquaintances. [...] Generational curses can END or be avoided by a praying, virtuous woman! Whatever standards we set, they will live by! Whatever we deem acceptable, they will follow!"

- *"A necessary ingredient for a compatible union, in spite of the abuses that occur when men are wrongly taught about their headship, is that women submit to their husbands. What does God expect of women in this area? First of all, we must understand that submission is an attitude and not just an action. Submission begins in the heart. [...] Many times women who claim to be submissive are only outwardly going through the motions of submission while inwardly they are still resenting their position in life. A prayer of submission would be in order: "Father, help me to be content in the role you created me for and give me a submissive spirit"*
- *"it takes a strong woman to take care of a household. But we do it for the love of god an family."*

Nonreligious justifications include:

- *"woman was made to be a helpmate..not to over-rule, or to walk on. I believe 100% that the man should work, and the woman take care of the home. Many of my old friends, would call me a 1950's style housewife [...] I don't think its right for a man to work 12-16 h a day, like Bear does, to have to come home, cook dinner and wash dishes..what kind of wife would I be? A pretty lousy one..and I make sure he is taken care of, because he takes care of me."*

- *"Man's logic and ideas, coupled with a woman's sensitivity, blend to aid each other in making decisions."*

Although the examples above are anecdotal, no statement was found in the LOTIES female corpus that contradicted, mitigated, or was inconsistent with this basic premise. Furthermore, these examples (and others that could not be reproduced for space limitations) correspond well to our findings as regards to the high proportion of LIWC themes, such as interpersonal pronouns (e.g., "we," "you"), affiliation markers, family related words, and religious language (Table 1). This recurrent premise, by which the submission to the husband and the Klan's authorities seems almost interchangeable with the religious submission to God and with conforming to reactionary fundamental "Christian Heritage" norms, is often further associated with the maternal duty to both the children as to the community at large.

This strictly gendered view of social identity and roles is commonly found in right-wing authoritarian movements (Bjørge 2014; Blee 2002; in CMCs: Anahita 2006; Brindle 2016; McNamee et al. 2010; Schafer 2002). For example, there is a striking similarity between the LOTIES understanding of their identity and role and the vision for women in the German Reich as articulated in a speech by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, as its minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, mere six weeks after Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist party took power:

"You know that the National Socialist movement is the only party that keeps women out of daily politics. This arouses bitter criticism and hostility, all of it very unjustified. We have kept women out of the

parliamentary-democratic intrigues of the past fourteen years in Germany not because we do not respect them, but because we respect them too much. We do not see the woman as inferior, but rather as having a different mission, a different value, than that of the man. Therefore we believed that the German woman, who more than any other in the world is a woman in the best sense of the word, should use her strength and abilities in other areas than the man...

No one who understands the modern age would have the crazy idea of driving women from public life, from work, profession, and bread winning. But it must also be said that those things that belong to the man must remain his. That includes politics and the military. That is not to disparage women, only a recognition of how she can best use her talents and abilities...

The first, best, and most suitable place for the women is in the family, and her most glorious duty is to give children to her people and nation, children who can continue the line of generations and who guarantee the immortality of the nation. The woman is the teacher of the youth, and therefore the builder of the foundation of the future. If the family is the nation's source of strength, the woman is its core and center. The best place for the woman to serve her people is in her marriage, in the family, in motherhood. This is her highest mission.” (Dr. Joseph Goebbels, 18 March 1933; Retrieved from <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb55.htm>)

Interestingly, Figure 3 shows that rhetorical components that are normally *de rigueur* in ideologies that advocate political violence are conspicuously under-represented in the LOTIES discourse. These include “all means necessary” sentiments, such as: “We cannot possibly suffer any longer” (IELEX item no. 12); “Now is the only viable time to act” or “horrific and irreversible things will happen if we don’t act now” (IELEX item no. 13) and “Violent force is the only way to defeat the enemy/better our situation” (IELEX item no. 15). As mentioned, the vehemence with which the LOTIES discourse emphasizes social conformity, mutual interdependence, and righteousness inevitably instills in its members a pervasive sense of overprotectiveness and urgency in the face of imminent danger to the vaguely defined Christian “values” (or “heritage”) at large and to their fellow members in particular.

In spite of the ostensible dearth of explicit calls for violence, the IELEX paradigm nonetheless uncovered several rhetorical devices by which the LOTIES often couch their calls for violence. These include:

- (1) Strong scare-tactics assertions concerning the importance of the group’s cohesion to survival in a cataclysmic future, likely brought about by adversaries. For example:
 - “Are you willing to take a stand for your race? Do you believe in white heritage (obviously you do or you wouldn’t be here)... Being [...] firm on what I know is right, and by right I mean white. Now don’t think I hate anyone else, because I honestly don’t, but if you

do wrong to my people...then we have an issue! Being in the KKK has ...made me ready to stand for my Christian rights and beliefs and my rights as a white woman when the time comes...which I fear is close at hand.”

- “If we had some more women as good as our Loties out in the world, I wouldn’t see some of the race trading trash I see on a daily basis!”
- “I feel so much more relieved now that we can stock pile more food, have traps, some ammo stocked up and canning materials knowing that we can provide for our family incase the economy collapses”
- “We will never cower before any master or bend to any threat.”

(2) Carefully quoting historical figures that extol the inevitable link between political violence and self-preservation. Social Learning theory posits that using quotes from known heroes or patriots is safer as a persuasive tool for political violence. Furthermore, these quotes are often seen repeatedly by members, since they are often used in the user’s signature. These include (note the exclamation points and other punctuation marks to further emphasize their significance and gravitas):

- “I will give up my guns when they pry my cold dead hands from around them!” (Charlton Heston).
- “I chose death before dishonor....I rather die then live down on my knees!!!!”
- “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” (Thomas Jefferson)
- “I shall...endeavor to do my duty and fight to the last.” (Robert E. Lee)
- “he [William J. Simmons] made it is mission to show everyone that the Klan was out to mean business, but also there to help when help was needed.”

Taken together, the IELEX ideological profile suggests an internally consistent set of persuasive arguments that “spins” obedience and conformity as strength of character in the fight for defending the Christian white heritage, thus inducing a sense of pride and superiority vis-à-vis liberals and feminists. In return for this obedience and conformity, the LOTIES are promised absolute social support (see Table 2, e.g.) and religious righteousness. These two nonmutually exclusive persuasive arguments may appeal both to believers and nonbelievers.

Discussion

This study used mixed-methods analysis to characterize and quantify gender differences in the themes and sentiments as they naturally occur in textual exchanges of gender-specific male and female KKK subforums online. The overall pattern of results suggests a rather stark gendered ‘division of labor’ in the concerns, themes, and sentiments between the female LOTIES subforum and its corresponding male forum. Word Frequency analysis shows that discourse among members of the LOTIES subforum was largely addressed to other LOTIES members. Additionally, the conversations were distinctly more upbeat, emotional, introspective, interpersonal, communal, and explicitly supportive

in tone than the discourse of the corresponding male KKK subforum. Thematically, the LOTIES forum was mostly focused on religious, corporal (e.g., body, health, diet), and heterosexual relationship or marital issues, along with proposed solutions to them.

In contrast, the male subforum was replete with news items that support the bleak, disgruntled, and conspiratorial views that right-wing extremists generally hold against the world at large and the U.S. government in particular (Bjelopera 2012; Blee and Creasap 2010; Brannan et al. 2014). Concomitantly, the discourse of the male forum was mostly focused outwardly, on the vaguely defined enemy members (e.g., “they,” “them”) and its presumed auxiliaries (e.g., federal government officials, then-president Barak Obama, illegal immigrants, minorities, etc.). The tone of the male subforum was distinctly more authoritative than the female subforum, and support often expressed circuitously through sarcasm or further lecturing. In addition, issues pertaining to the economy, work, and/or money concerns appeared almost exclusively in the male subforum, as were explicit references to sex (as opposed to romance), violence, and death.

This study used a novel paradigm that focuses on sentences that express absolutist and non-negotiable assertions and distills it from the circumlocution of pleasantries and inconsequential communications among group members. While the analysis of predominant themes and sentiments provided important information about the foci of interest for the group, an examination of their ideological profile provided details about the rhetorical and persuasive devices by which those interests are “spun” and internally connected to create an ideological interpretation of the world that is consistent with the group’s political aims.

The inclusiveness and accommodation of different ideological tropes, including religious and nonreligious, ideological, and practical (among others) may be a characteristic of the online experience, whereby ideas emerge and evolve based on their general appeal rather than being imposed by an ideolog (however charismatic) with their dogmatic idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. These characteristics of the online experience add further to the presumed benefits of leaderless organizational structure, which current extremist groups seem to favor, both on- and offline (Berlet and Vysotsky 2006; Enders and Jindapon 2010; Everton and Cunningham 2015; Freilich et al. 1999; Levin 2002, p. 964). Furthermore, the intrinsic leaderlessness of online social networks and their reliance on online traffic and ratings arguably facilitate the emergence of a broad-based ideological common denominator, especially since the removal of members (which is more common in physical groups) is harder. Conversely, studies of extremist groups have frequently identified the leader’s ideological rigidity as a root cause for the decline and even death of the group (e.g., Asal and Rethmeyer 2011; Hogg 2001; Freilich et al. 2009; Ligon et al. 2008; Strange and Mumford 2002). In the case of the KKK, a recent study showed that the failure of the KKK to start a third wave in the mid-1970s/early 1980s was due to the inability of its leaders to modify their hierarchical grip on the movement and to allow for “safe havens” to form and their failure to modify their ideology to fit existing societal concern (Brister 2011).

After being shunned by mainstream Protestant churches, the KKK endorsed the ideology of Christian Identity, which

was based on an obscure and largely irrelevant framing of their supremacy and goals around Genesis’ “original sin,” by which all non-white races deserve hate as descendants of the sinful union of Eve with the devil in the form of a snake. In contrast, our results point to the online environment as a spontaneous modern-day remedy to the obstacles of the 1970s/1980s failures: the leaderless online environment have organically given rise to a broad-based far-right ideology rooted in social gatherings and support and touts vague defense of “Christian heritage” and “Christian values” without the more controversial elements of theological fundamentalism and exegesis. As a result, these discussions render any hate toward inferior races implicit, more palatable, and more compatible with the concerns of the average disaffected American.

Overall, our results indicate that the social support function (and the presumed social cohesion it engenders) that historically characterized the physical Klan chapters has not disappeared online but merely became more virtual (see also Holt and Bolden 2014). Perhaps to compensate for the diminished physical support, exclamations of social support are some of the strongest put sentences in the LOTIES discourse and include hyperbolic statements like: “We are all here for you, always.” Or “Yes indeed we are your family, we will *always* be there for you. If you should *ever* need *anything* just let us know!!!” (see additional examples in Table 1). In fact, throughout the LOTIES corpus, the word “family” refers to fellow KKK members more often (33 times out of total 59 mentions of the word “family,” or 56%) than to any biological family, whereas the word-stems “adopt*” and “naturaliz*” are used *exclusively* to denote assimilation to the Klan.

Our findings suggest that what may seem an affable, wholesome, and inclusive online forum that is enthusiastically dedicated to providing social support and sense of community and identity to its members might in fact function as a seamless mechanism for gradually involving individuals in need of social support and identity in supremacist activities (Castle 2012). As the level of social immersion and indebtedness increases, the commitment to the interests of the group (buttressed by frequent reminders to that effect) inevitably facilitates the belief in the ideologically-motivated focus on the governmental and societal obstacles to those interests. This augmented sense of commitment naturally morphs into a sense of overprotectiveness toward the group members. This overprotectiveness, in turn, is wielded by the group towards overt resentment and hate toward outgroup members.

Our model is consistent with a variety of studies that elucidated the pivotal role that social support and sense of social interdependency play in recruitment and retention of hate group members (Kruglanski et al. 2014; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Post 1998; Sageman 2008). For example, in her 2002 book that summarizes interviews with 34 female activists of far-right organizations in the United States, Blee (2002, p. 28) claims that, overall, the women she interviewed “more often described their sense of racist urgency as a consequence of associating with members of racist groups than as its cause.” Similarly, in a sample of 24 female perpetrators involved in far-right homicides, González et al. (2014) found that personal relationships (whether friendly or romantic) were a stronger predictor of involvement in domestic terrorism for women than for men.

Naturally, observable word choice is a culmination of a complex interplay between the opinions and attitudes that the members wish to express and the discursive norms within the social milieu in which they express them (Brown and Levinson 1987; Wardhaugh 2010). For example, our results indicate that the discourse in the female subforum, as compared with that of the male subforum, may be ostensibly devoid of explicit aggression markers (e.g., slurs, words connoting power, risk, and anger—see Table 1 for more details). However, our findings suggest that there is nonetheless considerable implied aggression in the tight social control that the LOTIES members exert on each other to conform. Thus, while male KKK members use explicit language of power, sex, and swear words to affect authority, the LOTIES frequently preach and exhort each other (Table 2 and Fig. 3) to defer to (white) make authority in general and to their husbands in particular, to denounce the “feminism” of their liberal friends or the liberal media, and to contribute to the cause—especially by adopting or recruiting new members. Future studies could shed more light on this dynamics of covert aggression by interviewing members who have left the KKK about their decision and discerning whether they indeed were affected by such implicitly aggressive or coercive peer pressure.

Conclusion

Taken together, our findings point to the LOTIES female forum as constituting a highly appealing, persuasive, and adaptive apparatus for recruitment and inculcation of female members (and their husbands and children) to the KKK ideology and functions (Castle 2012). Our Text- and Content-analysis results suggest that the naive reader of the LOTIES forum would likely be lured by its overwhelmingly upbeat, supportive, and wholesome language, and may even be pleasantly surprised by the lack of overt racism, hate and other distasteful aspects of the KKK ideology, such as anti-Semitism, pro-Nazism, and so on. Furthermore, our results suggest that the emphasis of the LOTIES forum on extolling and defending white Christian “culture” may appeal to both religious and nonreligious members, since their word choice is consistent with an instrumental and generic, rather than theological and divisive use of Christian keywords. Our peer-responsiveness analysis uncovered a strong *implicit* interest in non-Christian identities (e.g., Germanic, Celtic, etc.), in contrast to the strong *explicit* interest in Christianity on the linguistic surface.

However, computational methods that examined linguistic patterns outside the awareness of both the writers and the readers in the forum showed that the LOTIES seemingly upbeat, supportive, and wholesome discourse belie an effective arsenal of persuasive appeals to conform and obey their husbands and KKK male leaders. As the IELEX analysis shows, conformity and obedience are “spun” as a strength of (Christian) character, and are justified by the considerable gains that they offer the conforming member in terms of social and moral support by the group. The strong emphasis that the LOTIES have on inclusion and participation is complemented by hyperbolic exclamations of social interdependence and commitment. Despite their excessive and hyperbolic nature, our findings suggested that most members respond to those platitudes with genuine

gratitude. Thus, virtual social cohesion, which is absent in in-person interactions, may paradoxically confer greater sense of support and indebtedness to the KKK cause and ideology among its female members.

Our results further showed that the prosocial discourse of the LOTIES faded once we examined their discourse through a computer-aided “prism” that highlights sentences that are high in cognitive rigidity. A distinct subgroup of these sentences expressed the urgent and dire need to protect and defend the “white heritage” of the members at large and their children in particular. These sentences were often embedded within a righteous denunciation of progressive worldview, in which women’s liberation was denounced as the cause of pervasive moral depravity, drug addiction, and violence against white Americans. Furthermore, the LOTIES efforts to raise awareness and mobilize support for this defense were often couched within both implicit and explicit (if nonspecific) condemnations of the U.S. government for enabling this state of affairs. The LOTIES supplemented those appeals for implicit violence with social learning persuasive devices, in which they chose quotes from famous American heroes and patriots that extolled violence for political aims. Similar combination of implicit promotion of violence that is compounded with social learning pressure in the form of praise for violent acts was also found in the U.S. modern militia movement (Freilich et al. 1999).

As a patchwork of generic and mutually compatible ideological components that is borne of the online medium and as such is geared toward maximal popular appeal, our study suggests that the LOTIES version of the KKK ideology is highly effective and adaptive. Further, the high level of reproducibility in our computer-based methods makes it possible to reliably detect changes in the LOTIES discourse, should the political sensitivities and concerns of the right-wing leaning audience ever change with the changing political climate.

This analysis must, however, be replicated with larger data sets to validate its findings, and to gauge the extent to which female identity construction is consistent across different ideologically related far-right groups. Although this study demonstrated the common themes and variations between subforums on the basis of gender, additional research is needed to understand the influence and acceptance of posted themes among users who mostly “lurk”, rather than post in the online environment. Research on radicalization to violence demonstrates that mere exposure to online messaging can be an important influence on behavior (Daniels 2009; Koehler 2014; McNamee et al. 2010; Von Behr et al. 2013; Weimann 2006; Winkler and Dauber 2014), although it is unclear what role individual posting behaviors play in the process of ideological radicalization. Thus, case studies of the online behaviors of individuals who have engaged in ideological violence or support of terror may be a valuable way to address this gap in the literature.

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